

fPresident Obama has had a busy first 100 days in office, laying out a plan for withdrawing troops from Iraq, bolstering our presence in Afghanistan and attending the Summit of the Americas in Trinidad and Tobago.

The plan to withdraw combat troops from Iraq by the end of December 2011 is a responsible plan. I have long advocated that we must put Iraqis back in charge of Iraq, and until plans are announced that U.S. soldiers are leaving, there is little reason for Iraqis to step up to the plate.

The final war supplemental bill also passed through Congress in May. I'm pleased that an announcement was made that this will be the final supplemental spending bill for military actions. The conflicts in the Middle East are not unexpected, they're not an emergency and they should be incorporated into the annual budget process. That will give Congress a better opportunity to fully vet what the funds are being spent on, and it's a responsible approach to budgeting.

During Appropriations Committee consideration of the supplemental legislation, I successfully amended the bill to require the administration report on troop drawdown status and goals, information that Congress has never had before. As soldiers leave Iraq, there must be accountability and oversight. That said, I still am a staunch opponent of this war and look forward to working with Democratic leaders to bring all U.S. troops home.

Afghanistan has become even more violent, and additional soldiers are being sent there to bolster our presence. I have been working with a variety of stakeholders to ensure that a strong civilian presence is also incorporated into our plans for this conflict. Defense Department officials and high-ranking military officers have admitted for years that these conflicts cannot be won by armed conflict alone, they require civilian experts from the State Department and USAID.

Finally, there has been a lot of movement on issues relating to Latin America and the Caribbean. The Summit of the Americas in February was a smashing success. The United States, long shunned by the rest of the hemisphere, is once again a member of the Americas, and this summit showed that. There has finally been a loosening of restrictions on U.S. dealings with Cuba, and other leaders from the region are showing a willingness to cooperate like we have seen before. It's a very exciting time for our relations abroad.

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